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COMMUNICATIONS.

I.

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF MATHEMATICS TEACHERS:

I deeply appreciate the honor which you bestowed upon me when you elected me president of your organization, and I am also mindful of the responsibility which this office carries. It is my hope that we may further the organization and lay plans for the improvement of the teaching of mathematics as a means of training for citizenship. In this I earnestly solicit the cooperation of mathematics teachers throughout the country.

It is too early to state definitely the plans for the work of the years, but they will doubtless include the following:

1. The careful consideration of suggestions made by any who are interested in the teaching of mathematics.
2. Furthering the work of the National Committee under the leadership of Dr. J. W. Young by trying to have its findings used as the basis for the courses of study in our Junior and Senior High Schools.
3. Placing in the hands of teachers the detailed material without which the work of the National Committee cannot succeed to the fullest.
4. An effort to determine the best method to present the work outlined by the National Committee.
5. An effort to continually improve the Mathematics Teacher and to extend the services rendered by it.
6. The extension of the membership of the National Council to include, as nearly as possible, all teachers of mathematics throughout the country.
7. The appointment of a representative in each state who shall be responsible for the work of the Council in his state.

J. H. MINNICK.

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TO THE EDITOR OF THE MATHEMATICS TEACHER:

In the twentieth annual report (1920) of the Secretary of the College Entrance Examination Board appears the following chart:

This is a highly significant chart for teachers of algebra in the Eastern States. A standard which exhibits a fluctuation in the number of successful candidates of from less than 40 per cent. to more than 70 per cent. in a period of three years is obviously no standard at all. And yet it is the standard. Are these fluctuations with their untoward effects upon the schools necessary?



CHART VII. Elementary Algebra. The solid line shows the percentage of candidates whose books were rated 60-100. Dotted line shows for all books written at all ordinary examinations the percentage rated 60-100.

In answer to this question we can maintain with reason that the fluctuations are due both to the examinations and to the method of rating. At present the group of successful candidates in any year is composed of those who can answer correctly 60 per cent. of a paper subject to the definition of the value of parts of the paper as determined by the readers for that year. To maintain a standard under this system would require that the papers be of a standard degree of difficulty

and that the definition of relative values of parts of the papers bear a reasonable relation to their actual difficulty. These statements are of course predicated upon the assumption that the preparation of the candidates is relatively uniform from year to year. The dotted line in the chart shows this to be a reasonable assumption for it is unlikely that the preparation in mathematics would fluctuate violently while that in the other subjects did not. If it be contended that the dotted line shows nothing but the smoothing out process of averaging we can still maintain with reason that it is unlikely in the nature of things that there should be such *extreme* variations in view of the inertia of large numbers and the country-wide nature of the representation.

In view of the efforts made by the Board to remedy the situation by tinkering with the examinations the chart is abundant evidence that there is nothing much to be hoped for in that direction. The machinery of the Board offers no possibility of standardization. If there is nothing to be hoped for from the examinations is there anything which can be done to relieve the situation?

The writer is of the opinion that the situation could be alleviated by reporting the results of the examinations by groups under an annual definition of the groups which would insure reasonable uniformity.

"To pass" is a definite act. "A passing percentage" is a snare and a delusion, for experience shows that it is not a constant but a variable with a wide range. When seventy-five per cent. are successful the colleges complain of poor material. When less than forty per cent. are successful the schools know that adequately prepared candidates are eliminated.

HOWARD F. HART.

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